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ABSTRACT

In order to expand career guidance and counseling in elementary and middle schools, the availability of resources and materials that support career development activity was investigated and exemplary career guidance and counseling programs were identified. Results of the study revealed the following characteristics of effective programs: (1) exposure to career awareness and exploration is provided early; (2) students are assisted in identifying their interests and aptitudes and choosing their school courses; (3) career paths are viewed as a broad range of options; (4) a structured program helps students understand the world of work; (5) students have an opportunity to work or volunteer in business; and (6) curriculum is challenging and relevant. The study also found that the most effective career development programs are systemic (developmental, embedded in the curriculum, and accessible to all students). Leading curricular reform are schools involved in the Southern Regional Educational Board's "High Schools that Work" and the "New American Schools" project. A "Career Guidance Resource Guide for Elementary and Middle/Junior High School Educators" will be published in 1998 by the American Vocational Association and the American School Counselors Association. (KC)

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National Center for Research in Vocational Education

University of California, Berkeley

# Office of Student Services' BRIEF

Volume 9, Number 1

## CAREER GUIDANCE FOR ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

by Carolyn Maddy-Bernstein and Donna E. Dare

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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*During 1997, the Office of Student Services (OSS) worked to expand career guidance and counseling in elementary and middle schools by investigating the availability of resources and materials that support career development activity. OSS also joined with the U.S. Department of Education, the American Vocational Association, and the National Association of State Career Development/Guidance Supervisors to identify exemplary career guidance and counseling programs. This* ***BRIEF*** *contains some of the results of our work. While these findings in themselves are not new to most practitioners, we hope that the following discussion will encourage the expansion of effective career guidance practices, especially at the elementary and middle school levels. In addition, we will describe a new OSS resource designed to help practitioners identify resources to support their efforts to strengthen educational programs.*

### Results of Effective Programs

In our review of exemplary career guidance and counseling programs, OSS found effective programs make a positive difference in terms of student outcomes. Clearly, students at all grade levels fair better when they:

- are exposed to career awareness and exploration before they make critical choices at the high school and postsecondary levels;
- have continued assistance in identifying their strengths, interests, and aptitudes;
- are helped to view career paths as a *broad range of options* available to them;
- have a well-planned, structured school program to assist them in understanding the world of work;
- have an opportunity to work/volunteer in business through secondary school programs;
- find curriculum challenging and relevant to their interests; and
- work with their parents, counselors, and teachers to select school courses and programs.

### Programs Are Systemic

We noted the most effective career development programs are truly systemic. In practical terms this means these programs must be:

- developmental in nature, beginning early in the educational continuum;
- accessible to every learner, especially those who are most at risk of failing in our schools and society; and
- embedded in the elementary and middle school curriculum as well as secondary and postsecondary curriculum.

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*Embedding and integrating career guidance in the curriculum.*

While students of all ages will change their minds many times throughout their educational experience, the process of providing every student with a wide range of accurate and comprehensive information to facilitate their decision-making processes is a vital role for counselors and teachers.

*In effective programs, career guidance does not look like an adjunct to the main body of the curriculum but is embedded into the entire program*

Effective career guidance programs are those that view career guidance as essential to the development of learners of all ages—as part of the whole process of educating a child for the larger thing called life. In effective programs, career guidance does not look like an adjunct to the main body of the curriculum but is embedded into the entire program. Effective practitioners understand the importance of "linking learning to life" (The Career Connection, 1997) and thus include career related information in their presentation of all materials—across *all* curricular areas, for *every* student, at *all* age levels. Thus, career guidance is a curricular issue relevant for early grade levels as well as high school.

*Using sound resources.*

Given the nature of young learners, practitioners must be diligent to select and apply soundly designed curriculum that addresses awareness and exploration of careers for *every* student in all grade levels. By integrating and embedding materials in the curriculum, all students in a classroom or educational setting are provided with more equitable opportunities to learn about careers of particular interest to them. Using integrated and embedded career guidance materials and resources as an essential part of the whole curriculum diminishes the effect of ingrained biases of teachers, counselors, and other academic personnel.

*A picture is truly worth a thousand words, especially in the eyes of young children.*

A picture is truly worth a thousand words, especially in the eyes of young children. Providing gender-fair and race-fair images and experiences to younger children, who are so impressionistic, is a viable practice that will facilitate their ability to make appropriate and perhaps even nontraditional individual choices as they develop and mature. Using well designed materials and resources for students at early age levels should be viewed as an essential part of the long-range academic process designed to enhance overall student performance and, ultimately, to change outcomes for the better as students transition from school to work.

*Leading curricular reform.*

Many schools across the nation have been very aggressive in using career guidance to drive curricular reform and to enhance student performance. In particular, Southern Region Educational Board's (SREB's) High Schools That Work have been cited repeatedly by researchers as having significant impact on improving student performance. The New American High Schools have reported similar successes. NCRVE's Office of Student Services' Exemplary Career Guidance Award Programs have demonstrated their own versions of success. What we know from ***The Neglected Majority*** (Parnell, 1985) and other studies from the 1980s is that education wasn't working for many students. What we know from at least many of these newer model programs who feature reorganization around systemic career guidance, curricular reform, and career pathways is that student performance seems to be improving. Progress and measurable change can be slow; but it would serve us well as practitioners to look for various indicators of success along the path to change, particularly in early stages of reform efforts. However, the key to these educational reforms is to begin career guidance at much earlier age levels.

*...it would serve us well as practitioners to look for various indicators of success along the path to change...*

## New Approaches to Meeting the Developmental Needs of Every Student

As educational personnel deal with curricular issues, educators must have adequate professional development. This professional development should include a focus on *how* to incorporate career guidance resources and materials to support the development of every learner under their guidance. But professional development must also help educators think differently. It must facilitate new approaches to meeting on the developmental needs of young learners.

*Using alternate and new resources.*

Many exemplary career guidance programs that promote and enhance student performance are effective because they integrate the community at large in the process of educating even young children. This approach includes involving parents, peers, adults on the job site, and many others who are able to provide a comprehensive range of support services and information that enhance a student's chances for success.

What this means for the classroom teacher or the guidance counselor is that we cannot, in fairness to students, work in isolation or work autonomously. We need to see ourselves as part of the larger team who provide education and supportive resources throughout the educational life of a student. Student development is dependent on the willingness of educational personnel to interact with others who will help support the development of learners of all ages.

Through an extensive review of resource materials for elementary and middle school career guidance, we have compiled a resource guide for elementary and middle school practitioners involved in career guidance. Early in 1998, the American Vocational Association and the American School Counselors Association are tentatively scheduled to jointly publish this resource guide entitled ***Career Guidance Resource Guide for Elementary and Middle/Junior High School Educators***. The contents include a variety of resources for practitioners, including the National Career Development Guidelines and a career development activities chart with full explanations of suggested career-related activities for various developmental levels.

The bulk of the resource guide is comprised of resource lists for three grade levels: K-3, 4-6, and 7-8. The resource materials are listed by title and also include information on author, date of publication, type of material, grade level recommended, publisher/manufacturer and/or distributor of the resource, current price information, and a description of the materials. At the recommendation of our special Advisory Board for this project, we also included ratings by selected practitioners. While it is impossible to identify all available resources for elementary and middle school career guidance, this guide provides an extensive list of materials that support developmental career guidance for learners in these age groups. Please watch for this upcoming publication.

## References

The Career Connection. (1997). Volusia/Flagler County Schools, Florida Exemplary Career Guidance Program Application. Available on web site: ncrve-oss.ed.uiuc.edu.

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